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INL cuts total fuel use 20 percent while increasing use of biodiesel, E85

Idaho National Laboratory is fueling down. Through June 2009, INL fuel use is down more than 167,000 gallons from the same period in 2006.

Four key tactics have resulted in a 20.2 percent fuel reduction for the first nine months of Fiscal Year 2009 as compared to just four years ago. There's more good news – the laboratory is using more biodiesel and E85 fuels than ever before.

"Five years ago, we inherited an aging vehicle fleet in great need of modernization," said INL Facilities & Site Services Director Dwayne Coburn. "Battelle Energy Alliance has put significant resources into sustainability by increasing the use of nonpetroleum fuel products, modernizing our fleet, improving our mass transit routes and reducing unnecessary vehicle use. Today you can see the result – and it is safe to say we will continue to show significant improvements in this area in the future."

The savings soon runs into money – more than \$300,000 this year at current fuel prices, which have declined considerably since their peak last fall.

Increasing use of alternate fuels

INL has dramatically increased the use of alternate fuels, which include biodiesel and the ethanol-based fuel E85 (a blend of 85 percent ethanol from bio sources with 15 percent gasoline). In April of this year, the entire INL bus fleet began running on B20 – a blend of 80 percent petroleum-based diesel with 20 percent bio-based fuel. Since then, the fleet has consumed more than 15,000 gallons of B20, creating a dramatic upward spike in INL's biofuel profile.

"E85 is now available at locations across the INL Site and at the INL Research Center in town," said Tad Pearson, fuel manager. "Employees have been instructed to use E85 in every INL vehicle that is capable of using it. We continue to evaluate new fuel combinations that will increase our use of sustainable biofuels versus petroleum fuels."

Fleet modernization

More than a quarter of the INL passenger bus fleet has been replaced with new fuel-efficient buses in the past four years. The average new bus carries more passengers and gets 25 percent better mileage than the older ones do. The bus fleet upgrade is on schedule to be complete within four years.

The INL light-duty fleet of cars and pickup trucks is also being modernized. A contract with the General Services Administration signed last year provides a continuing flow of new, fuel-efficient vehicles to replace the worn-out ones, some as old as 20 years, that have been in service too long. The new vehicles operate on E85. Modernizing the fleet also cuts fleet maintenance costs – a separate savings amounting to thousands of dollars annually.

Mass transit improvements

INL bus routes have been streamlined this year – reducing the total number of routes while eliminating many of the old start-and-stop patterns that wove through residential neighborhoods. Centralization of passenger pickup locations continues and has reduced vehicle miles, operating time and with that, fuel use.

Reducing unneeded vehicle use

INL drivers have also been coached in reducing unnecessary idling of vehicle engines. Now, engines are frequently turned off briefly as buses wait to load passengers at the Site. With a fleet of approximately 100 buses, the savings can run into more than 1,000 gallons of fuel per month. The use of INL light-duty vehicles has also declined as INL encourages employees to ride its shuttle buses and vans, which run on a regular schedule to INL remote facilities to accommodate employee schedules.

INL is one of the DOE's 10 multiprogram national laboratories. The laboratory performs work in each of the strategic goal areas of DOE: energy, national security, science and environment. INL is the nation's leading center for nuclear energy research and development. Day-to-day management and operation of the laboratory is the responsibility of Battelle Energy Alliance.

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INL- 09-035

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